

11 Arrested For Blaze At India Fireworks Factory

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SIVAKASI, India (AP) — Police in southern India arrested 11 employees of a fireworks factory on Thursday, a day after a massive blaze at the facility killed 40 workers and injured 60 others.

The arrests came as grieving relatives cremated the charred bodies of their loved ones, who died Wednesday when the fire blew up large amounts of firecrackers and raw materials stored at the factory.

On Thursday, police arrested 11 employees of the Om Siva Shakti factory on charges of culpable homicide and storing explosives illegally, said police officer Najmal Hoda.

Soundarajan, who uses one name, said his 19-year-old son who died in the blaze was a part-time worker at the factory, which needed extra workers to meet the demand for firecrackers ahead of the coming Hindu festival season.

"My son left in the morning, and a few hours later we heard the loud sound of the blast, which even shook our house nearby," Soundarajan said. "Only later I came to know that my son had lost his life."

Police were looking for the factory's owner, Murugesan, who fled Sivakasi town after the fire. Murugesan, who also uses one name, is a local leader of the governing regional party, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhgam.

Hoda said the factory was operating illegally after authorities suspended its license for major safety violations.

State authorities have ordered an investigation into the cause of the fire.

Sivakasi town in Tamil Nadu state is India's biggest hub for the manufacture of firecrackers, which are used in religious festivals and weddings across the country. Sivakasi is about 500 kilometers (310 miles) southwest of Chennai, the state capital.

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